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DECORATIVE ART AT AMSTERDAM.

BY THEODORE CHILD.

THE mere description of the marvels of decorative art that still remain in the museums and in the architecture in general of the Netherlands, would be of no practical use unless accompanied by careful drawing of ensembles and of details. Furthermore, such a description would need several volumes.

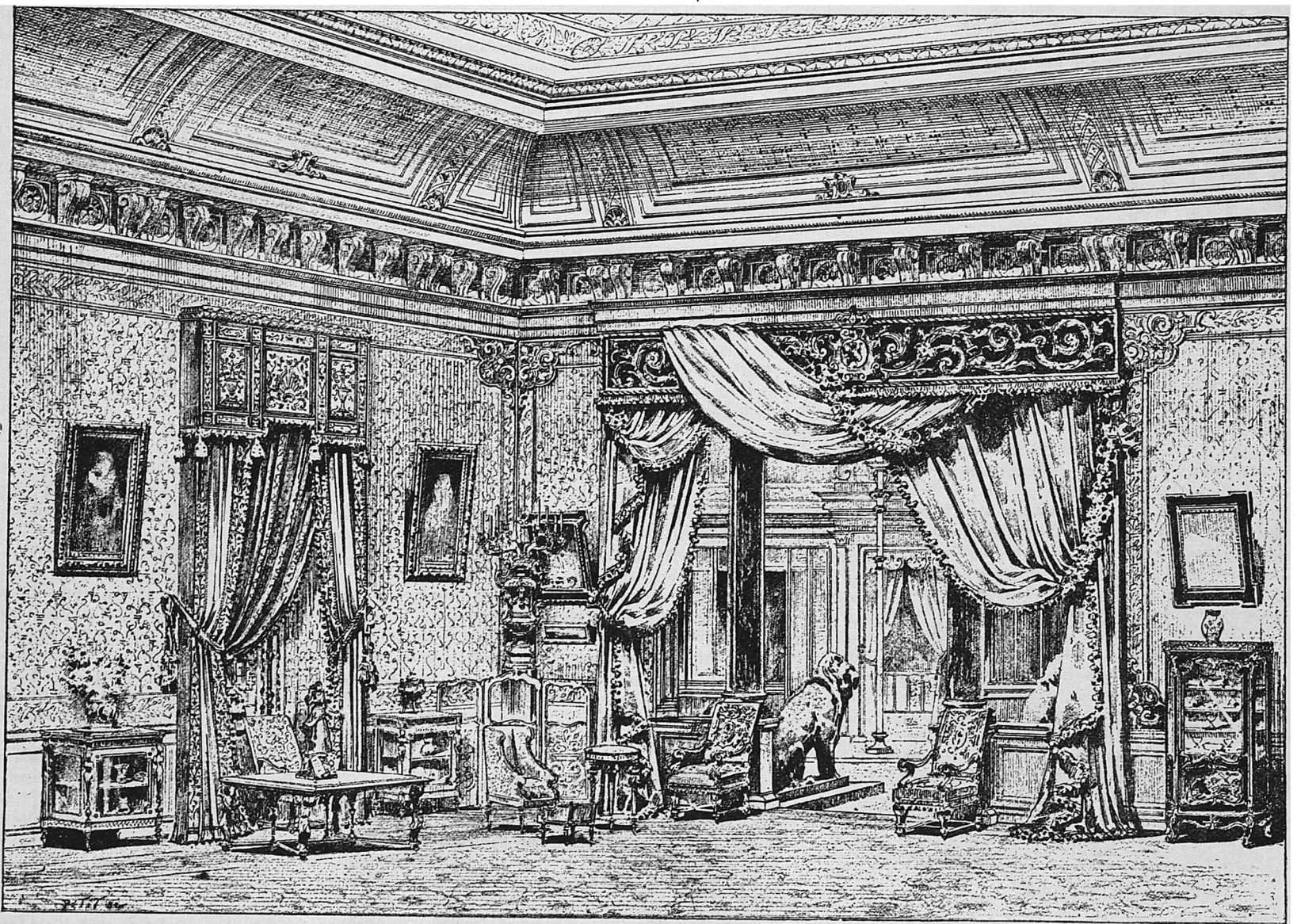
We will content ourselves, therefore, with the few summary notes and impressions concerning the characteristic specimens of ancient and modern art that were concentrated this Summer in the international exhibition at Amsterdam. First of all, as regards modern decorative art; in wandering through the galleries of the exhibition one could not help being struck by the triumph of the Renaissance style. In the Dutch, Belgian, German and French sections architects and designers celebrated the glory of the Renaissance. Everywhere you saw salons, dining-rooms, buffets, dressers, cupboards, beds, chimney-pieces, the originals of which may be seen in the chateaux built by the contemporaries of Jean Goujon. In the copies you find the same purity of line, the same pagan forms, the same profusion of ex-

Paris and the Dutch towns. Since the Paris Exhibition of 1878 the Belgians have certainly made immense progress. One may say that the Renaissance is now thoroughly known and perfectly interpreted in Belgium, and the prices of the Belgian makers are considerably cheaper than those of the French. Only the Belgians remain copyists, while some of the leading French makers are attempting to be themselves.

I noticed especially a modernised Renaissance salon of great beauty exhibited by Messrs. Krieger, Damon & Co. The central part is occupied by a chimney-piece of solid wood placed in a broad niche arched over at the top. On each side of the chimney-piece are panoplies and pieces of furniture with carved feet. The walls are hung with blue and *vieil or* paper in compartments marked off by fluted pilasters in waxed walnut. In arched niches around the walls and ornamented with wooden colonettes are bronzes, faïences and statuettes. This idea of niches in the walls of the salon is entirely new and, doubtless, contrived by the architect with a view to satisfying the modern taste for bibelots. For remark that the cult of bibelots, antiquities, artistic curiosities, masterpieces, or even mere relics of the past five or six centuries, is one of the most pronounced characteristics of the artists and writers of the present day, and after them of the general public. But the

and Belgians produce tables, buffets, bookcases, etc., for the general public of excellent style and workmanship and far cheaper than the French. But the Germans, it must be remembered, were always good cabinet makers, and Riesener, Cramer, Oreben and others whose work figures in the famous French *Mobilier National*, were born on the other side of the Rhine. On the other hand, the Germans in their desire to produce cheaply avoid the human figure in their carving, and avoid difficult and complicated designs. The consequence is a certain monotony.

In bronze, tissues for furniture and high class artistic furniture and decoration, the exhibition of the French at Amsterdam was immeasurably superior to that of any other nation. The splendid pavilion of the French Commission, erected at the initiation of the Union Centrale des Arts Decorative, combined in its architecture, decoration and furniture, masterpieces such as certainly no other European nation could produce. In the accompanying figures the reader will find a reproduction of some of the many remarkable objects. Speaking generally, the French have nothing to learn from their European competitors in the manufacture of really first class artistic furniture, but they have to fear both Belgians and Germans in the economical fabrication of ordinary artistic furniture.



GRAND SALON OF THE FRENCH COMMISSION AT THE AMSTERDAM EXPOSITION.

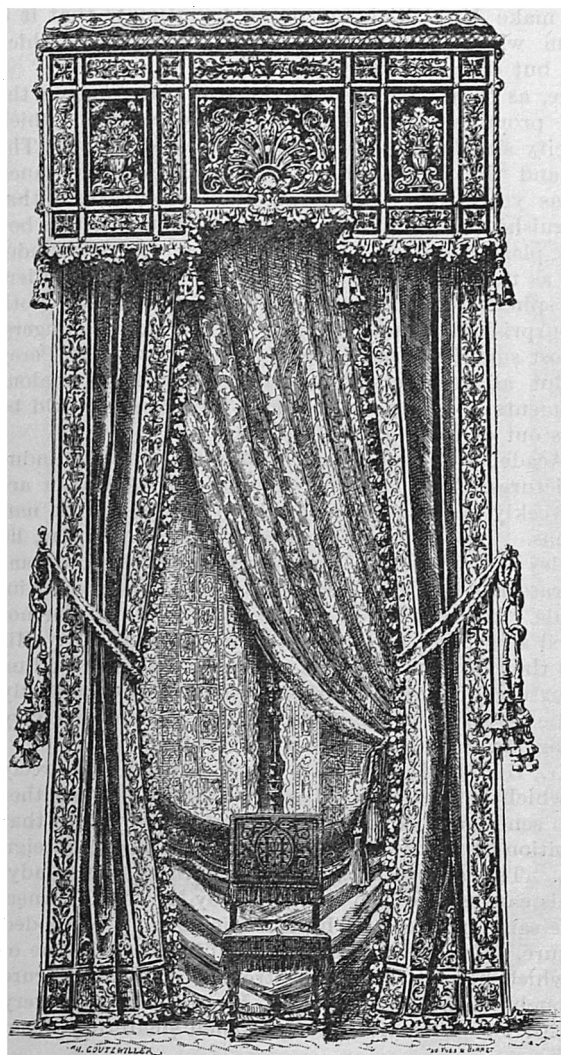
quisitely light ornaments. You may ask what is the explanation of this triumph of the Renaissance? The explanation is not far to seek. The characteristics of the Renaissance style are noble proportions, vivacity and an architectural firmness of line and body.

The furniture in the Renaissance style presents at once an artistic aspect and an aspect of solid luxury, an appearance, so to speak, of full value for money spent. It gives at relatively small cost a grand air to a room, and it does not need, in order to be fully appreciated, that thoroughly refined taste to which we owe the beautiful French Cabinet work of the XVIII. century. Again, the Renaissance furniture is made of solid wood; it is simply carpentry, joinery and carving; the delicacies of veneering, inlaying, marquetry and the alliance of bronze and wood were not practiced by the Renaissance artists. The fact of the simplicity of the manufacture of Renaissance furniture, together with its aptitude to satisfy the desire of the public for prompt and adequately artistic luxury, may be sufficient to account for the quantity of furniture of this style sent to Amsterdam from Mayence, Cologne, Brussels, Ghent,

past that provides the bibelots does not provide any place for them in the house, no piece of furniture destined specially to receive them. Hence, hitherto, the bibelots have been relegated to some cold glass-fronted cupboard or some corner what-not. Henceforward, thanks to the idea of the architect of these niches, the bibelots will form part of our daily life and take part in all our fêtes. The portieres of this salon are of a quiet blue, nobly and simply draped; the seats are of light brown, relieved with borders of *vieil or*; the carpet is pale gray blue; over the chimney-piece is a piece of sober decorative painting; the whole a perfect harmony and revealing a refinement of taste and sentiment of reposeful color, that we seek in vain elsewhere in the exhibition.

In the questions of style and make, those two factors of furniture, in *ensembles* as well as in individual pieces, France holds her old superiority, thanks to her architects and designers, but in current joinery and carving France is equalled by Belgium and even by Germany. In the carving of ornaments the Belgians are marvellously clever. In short, while the French remain unrivalled for Renaissance furniture of high prices, the Germans

In the various other societies of the Amsterdam exhibition there was very little to be noted. The Dutch exhibit quantities of Renaissance furniture, as already indicated, together with horrible productions in lacquer, inlaid with mother of pearl, modern Delft potiches transformed into clocks, panelling and parquet with black incrustations in imitation of the old Dutch style, rustic billiard tables whose frames and accessories are covered with wreaths and spirals of oak leaves and acorns carved in low relief, billiard tables with marble and parquet bottoms, and quantities of inferior pottery. The only good Dutch pottery worth noticing is produced by the manufactory of Delft, resuscitated a few years ago and naturally absorbed in the reproduction of the familiar blue and white patterns of old, a reproduction which is also the specialty of the Belgian firm of Boch Brothers at La Louviere. Of the Belgian section I have already spoken incidentally. I may add that some of the iron-workers, like M. Fondu Bloemendal of Vilvorde, turn out first class artistic lock and door fittings, particularly reproductions of old models. But, on the whole, with the exception of the French section, the modern department of the



WINDOW CURTAINS IN VIOLET VELOURS IN FRENCH PAVILION AT AMSTERDAM.

Amsterdam exhibition was not very rich in notable example.

The retrospective section, though not extensive, was exceedingly interesting. The collections of porcelain faience, silver and ironwork were of the choicest and rarest. Then, besides these collections, the directors of the department conceived the excellent idea of reconstituting specimens of a Dutch interior in the XVI., XVII. and XVIII. centuries. These rooms reflected well the peculiarities of the times they represented.

In the objects of French manufacture reproduced here the reader will remark that the inspiration, the line, the model, and the details are sought almost exclusively in the past. The designers whose influence is most active in France at the present day are not living men; they are Meissonier, Jean and Pierre Le Pautre, Ranson, Delafosse, La Londe, and the other great designers of the XVIII. century. Indeed, so perfect is the design and execution of modern French XVIII. century furniture that it is often sold as real antique, of course not by the manufacturers themselves, but by ingenious and unscrupulous dealers. It is no longer a secret that such and such a piece sold for a fabulous price at the Hamilton sale, was made within the last ten years in the neighborhood of the Rue Vieille du Temple.

WALL PAINTING.

THE best preparation for distemper is, says an authority on house painting, a thin flat coat of paint. The wall should at first be sized with a mixture made of soap, alum, and a little glue, tinting the size or paint to color, if dark colors are to be used or the wall is rough, as church walls are. The distemper itself should never be put on in more than one coat, as it tends to peel if thick. The glue should be covered with water, allowed to stand over night, the non-absorbed water poured off, and the glue melted. The color, made up with pigment and fine whiting or Paris white (or zinc white for very fine work) to a paste, is now mixed with the glue, and applied cool. An absorbent wall requires, of course, a larger quantity of water. If oil be used the wall should be primed or sized. The first coat ought to be of white-lead mixed with plenty of oil, a little japan, and some turpentine. The fourth or last coat should be made flat, well thinned with turpentine, but possess the full color intended. It is stated that the surface thus produced will bear cleaning with a damp cloth, although it contains little exposed oil. A wall with a smooth white sand finish, dry and hard, is necessary for coloring, and damp spots should be treated with shellac. For church walls, a rough floated surface is best for distemper. Stippling the wall surface is a method sometimes used for fine work, and is done by treating the

walls with the butt of the bristles. A solid effect is obtained by the process if a full coat of color is given first.

For wall colors, grays, greenish grays, or deep reds are suitable. Mr. W. Morris, in a list of wall colors, recommends a solid red, not very deep, but rather describable as a full pink, and toned with yellow and blue; a light orange pink to be used sparingly; a pale golden tint (yellowish brown), a very difficult color to hit; a pale copper color between these two; tints of green, from pure and pale to deepish and gray, always remembering that the purer the paler and the deeper the grayer. These are all tried and artistic colors. Perhaps a terracotta red or pink is one of the most useful colors for halls and the dados of dining rooms and staircases, where there is plenty of light. Tints of gray, from blueish to greenish tones, are suitable, and a salmon color is effective in a room full of cold light.—*The Building News*.

TURNING AND POLISHING IVORY.

As a material to be worked by the mechanic, ivory stands midway between wood and brass, and is turned and cut by tools having more obtuse angles than those employed for wood, and yet sharper than those used for brass. It may be driven at a fair speed in the lathe, and is easily sawed by any saw having fine teeth. The tools used for cutting and turning ivory should have their edges very finely finished on an oilstone so that they may cut smoothly and cleanly. Turned works with plain surfaces may in general be left so smooth from the tool as to require but very little polishing, a point always aimed at with superior workmen by the employment of sharp tools. In the polishing of turned works very fine glass paper or emery paper is first used, and it is rendered still finer and smoother by rubbing two pieces together face to face; secondly, whiting and water as thick as cream is then applied on wash leather, linen, or cotton rag, which should be thin that the fingers may the more rapidly feel and avoid the keen fillets and edges of ivory work, that would be rounded by excessive polishing; thirdly, the work is washed with clean water, applied by the same or another rag; fourthly, it is rubbed with a clean, dry cloth until all the moisture is absorbed, and, lastly, a very minute quantity of oil or tallow is put on the rag to give a gloss. Scarcely any of the oil remains behind, and the apprehension of its being absorbed by the ivory and disposing it to turn yellow may be discarded; indeed, the quantity of oil used is quite insignificant, and its main purpose is to keep the surface of the ivory slightly lubricated, so that the rag may not hang to it and wear it into rings or groovy marks. Putty powder is sometimes used for polishing ivory work, but it is more expensive and scarcely better suited than whiting, which is sufficiently hard for the purpose. The polishing of irregular surfaces is generally done with a moderately hard nail brush, supplied with whiting and water, and lightly applied in all directions, to penetrate every interstice; after a period the work

is brushed with plain water and a clean brush, to remove every vestige of the whiting. The ivory is dried by wiping and pressing it with a clean linen or cotton rag, and is afterwards allowed to dry in



LOUIS XVI. CHAIR IN GILDED WOOD. AMSTERDAM EXPOSITION.

the air, or at a good distance from the fire; when dry a gloss is given with a clean brush on which a minute drop of oil is first applied. It is better to do little polishing at first, so as to need a repetition of the process, rather than by injudicious



LOUIS XV. CHAIR. AMSTERDAM EXPOSITION.

activity to round and obliterate all the delicate points and edges of the works, upon the preservation of which their beauty mainly depends.

ARAB ART IN EGYPT.

THE Society for the Protection of Ancient Building has issued a report on the measures adopted by the Government of Egypt for the preservation of monuments of Arab art in that country. The report states that on the 18th of December, 1881, a decree was signed by the Khedive instituting a committee composed of high officials under the presidency of Mohammed Zeki Pasha, Minister of the Wakûf, with a view to the preservation of those monuments. The duties of the committee were—(1) to make an inventory of the Arab mountains in Egypt possessed of artistic or historic interest; (2) to watch over their maintenance; (3) to see to the execution of proper repairs; and (4) to insure the preservation in the archives of the Ministry of Wakûfs of plans of all work executed, and to indicate to that Ministry the fragments of monuments which ought to be transferred to the National Museum. The first meeting of the committee was held the 1st of February, 1882, but owing to the disturbed state of the country there was no second meeting until the 16th of December, 1882. At the first meeting two sub-committees were appointed to carry out the objects in view. As a result of the labors of the first sub-committee a list, dated 9th of June, 1883, has been made, comprising 664 monuments, consisting of mosques, tombs, drinking fountains, and schools, all situated in Cairo and the neighborhood. This list includes monuments of world-wide celebrity—such as the Mosques of Amru, of Tulun, Al Azhar, of Al Hakim, Sultan Hassan, and Al Ghuri, but does not omit small and obscure buildings of more or less modern date and of wholly subordinate interest. The report, likewise, mentions several monuments of much interest not included in the list.

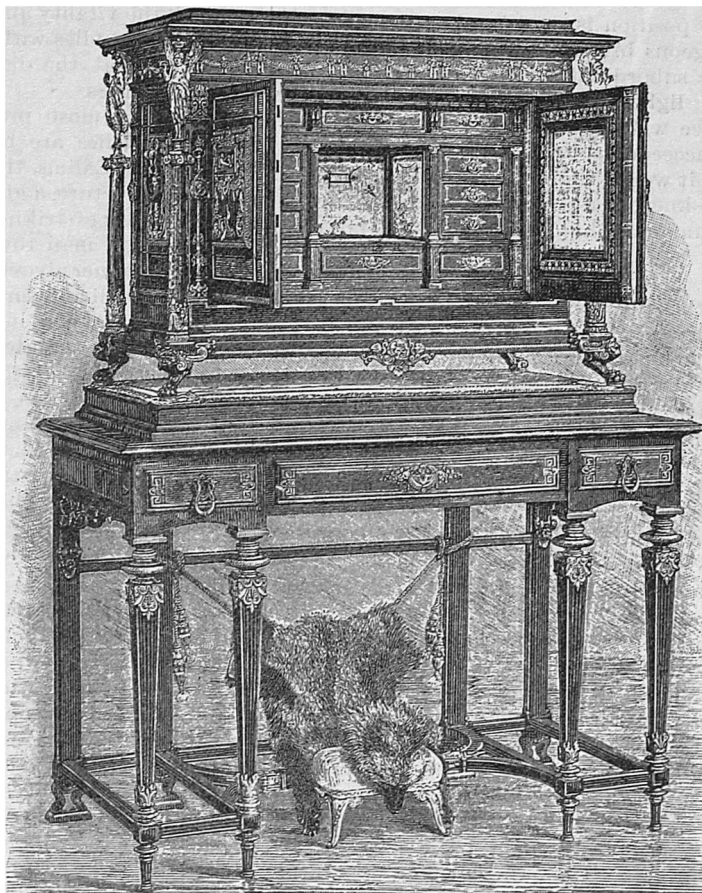


TABLE AND JEWEL CHEST IN IVORY AND SILVER. AMSTERDAM EXPOSITION.